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Review of Moshe Gorali, Gideon Almagor, and Moshe Bick, *The Golden Peacock: Yiddish Folksongs*

Abstract

This handsomely produced volume of texts and melodies from the "Ruth Rubin Yiddish Folksong Archive" contains seventy songs, which, except for six, were hitherto unpublished. Most of them were recorded by members of the Ethnological Section of Haifa Music Museum and A.M.L.I. Library, and by Ruth Rubin herself from informants who came to Israel from Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Bessarabia, Russia, and the Ukraine. In addition to the Yiddish texts, there are Hebrew and English notes and summaries of songs.

Disciplines

Cultural History | Folklore | Near and Middle Eastern Studies | Yiddish Language and Literature

the Jewish source material alone, without embarking on a Frazerian excursion for world-wide analogues. Although Lauterbach never delineates precisely what is meant by superstition and although his concept of the evolution of ceremony is not in accord with the full range of ethnological fact, he always has ample evidence to demonstrate that his conclusions are reasonable for the evolution of the particular custom in question.

A similar historical perspective is employed by the various contributors to *Beauty in Holiness*. The essays are mainly concerned with the development of Jewish ceremonial art and custom. Torah decorations, Hannukah lamps, and other objects and ceremonies are examined. Basically, the same general conclusions are reached for all the forms investigated: (a) Jewish ceremony and art are often the result of non-Jewish influence that was adapted by Jewish scholars and artisans; (b) the forms of Jewish ceremonial art are not the products of antiquity but are of much later origin; (c) the Jewish people independently reworked and adopted these non-Jewish influences. The importance of such conclusions in Liberal Jewry's appreciation of the *halakha* is clearly evident in Lauterbach's response.

Both volumes have been photo-reproduced from the journals in which the articles originally appeared, which accounts for the lack of uniformity in typeface, footnote style, and plate numbering and arrangement. Considering the high price of both volumes, it is inexcusable that two of Lauterbach's essays from *Studies in Jewish Law, Custom and Folklore* reappear in *Beauty in Holiness*.

The present review began with a characterization of the essays in these two volumes as "classic." It seems, however, that Jewish scholarship is perhaps still immersed in its classical era and has not emerged sufficiently for the reprinting of such essays to fulfill their purpose of offering scholars and students perspective about their own work. There are problems in the sociology, structure, and symbolism of contemporary Jewish art and custom that are neglected. The area of folklore, to which these volumes made some pretension, has been both misunderstood and neglected. Revolutions are taking place in the sciences of culture, and there is no reason that Jewish culture should be among the last to be studied from new and varied perspectives.

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ELLIOTT ORING

The Golden Peacock: Yiddish Folksongs. Edited by Moshe Gorali, Gideon Almagor, and Moshe Bick. (Haifa: Haifa Music Museum and A.M.L.I. Library, 1970. No price given.)

This handsomely produced volume of texts and melodies from the "Ruth Rubin Yiddish Folksong Archive" contains seventy songs, which, except for six, were hitherto unpublished. Most of them were recorded by members of the Ethnological Section of Haifa Music Museum and A.M.L.I. Library, and by Ruth Rubin herself from informants who came to Israel from Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Bessarabia, Russia, and the Ukraine. In addition to the Yiddish texts, there are Hebrew and English notes and summaries of songs.

The main goal of the Ethnological Section is to salvage the Yiddish musical tradition and to make it available to the scholarly as well as to the lay audience. Let us hope that their activities will interest the public in this musical tradition. In accordance with this

principle, only unpublished texts or tunes were included in this volume, and each song has some unique verbal or musical feature. Thus, the collection is not necessarily representative of Jewish folksong tradition. Nevertheless, thematically and musically, the volume contains a wide range of Yiddish folksongs. The texts are divided into seven sections: "Songs of Folk Life," "Love Songs and Ballads," "Artisan Songs," "Sabbath and Holiday Songs," "*Badchonim* and *Klezmorim* Songs" (Jesters and Folk Musicians), "Children's Songs," and "Melodies and Tunes." In all seven sections, most of the songs reflect the *shtetle's* culture of poverty. Helplessness, hunger, and melancholy are the themes that run throughout the texts. The love songs reflect more the conflict between the younger and the older generations about the choice of mates than the emotional feelings between the lovers themselves. Of particular interest are the jesters' songs and the melodies of the folk musicians, which constitute one part of Jewish folklore that needs further research.

Although the volume has a revivalistic goal, as it is intended to renew musical interest in the Yiddish folk tradition, by no means has it been popularized in any negative sense. The editors maintain accuracy of verbal and musical transcription throughout the volume and thus reflect dialectical differences within the Jewish song tradition. They also provide information about the informants' regions of origin. In order to boost this aspect of future volumes, it would be desirable to provide some further contextual description about the performance of the songs and to make note of some further biographical information, such as social class, occupation, education, and the actual social usage of the respective songs. Such information will be folkloristically valuable and generally interesting. In the case of *The Golden Peacock*, one of the editors, Moshe Bick, is also the informant for more than one-third of the songs. A more balanced selection of texts and tunes is desirable.

In conclusion, Israel is currently one of the ideal places to salvage the Yiddish folksong tradition. Such recording projects, of which songs in *The Golden Peacock* are just a beginning, are valuable to Yiddish and general folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and dialectologists alike.

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The Taste of Yiddish. By Lillian Mermin Feinsilver. (South Brunswick, New Jersey: Thomas Yoseloff, 1970. Pp. 437, preface, bibliography, index. \$10.00.)

Several years ago Leo Rosten published *The Joys of Yiddish*, a smoothly polished collection of anecdotes and observations. It was a surprising commercial success. Lillian Feinsilver was too late. Her book, however, could not have competed with Rosten's, because she does not have the popular touch, but then neither does she have the scholar's grasp of methodology that could have made this an especially significant contribution.

Feinsilver occasionally makes cross-cultural observations, but they are random ones and are seldom consistent. Italian and Pennsylvania German idioms and proverbs are the only ones she compares to the Yiddish with any regularity. When she discusses the influences of Yiddish on English she credits Yiddish as the source for the incomplete statement, such as, "I'll see you [later]." Living, as she does, in a Pennsylvania Dutch